

## **Evaluation of EFL Textbooks from Teachers' Viewpoints: a Case Study on the Third Grade Secondary School Textbook "Prospect3"**

**Mitra Zia**

M.A. Student, Department of English Language, Bandar Abbas Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas, Iran

**Shahram Afraz \***

Ph.D, Department of English Language, Qeshm Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qeshm, Iran

### **Abstract**

The present study was set out with the aim of investigating teachers' attitude towards the third grade secondary school new English textbook called "Prospects 3". To this end, 35 male and female teachers from different Secondary schools in Bandar Abbas took part in the study. The selection of participants was based on convenient sampling. In order to collect relevant data for the study a textbook evaluation checklist formed by McDonough and Shaw (1993), which consisted of 35 items about four aspects of textbooks, including: Aims and achievements, Skills, Language Type, and Technical considerations were administered to teachers. Teachers were given enough time about one month to answer agree/ neutral/ disagree to the items on the checklist based on their observations in the classes. After that, the checklists were collected and analyzed through a descriptive data analysis. In order to achieve the desirable results, means, and standard deviations were calculated. Finally, the result of the study revealed that with respect to this new formed ELT textbook, teachers had more positive attitudes towards aims and achievements, skills, and technical considerations of the book. The findings also revealed that EFL teachers showed the least positive attitude towards Language type, since they believe that in many cases the language and register employed in the textbook, were inauthentic.

**Keywords:** evaluation, textbook, teachers' attitude, case study

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since usage of English as an international language is increasing in all aspects of communication among people worldwide, it has become necessary for people to learn it as a foreign language in order to be able to communicate with people from other countries. Various countries whose first language is something other than English, like Iran, are aware of such necessity, thus English language course books are taught in schools among various grades. One of the important tools employed in the process of

teaching and learning English is textbooks. Textbooks are crucial aspects of language teaching and learning and second to teacher are regarded as the most vital element in the second/ foreign language classroom (Riazi, 2003).

According to Sheldon (1988), whether we like it or not, textbooks "represent for both students and teachers the visible heart of any ELT program" (p. 237). Moreover, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) generally think of textbooks as "providers of input into classroom lessons in the form of texts, activities, explanations, and so on" (p. 317). In addition, materials should elevate learners' interest and attention so that it could affect their English language learning as a foreign language (Tomlinson, 2001). Regarding English teaching and learning materials, specifically textbooks, Tomlinson (ibid) states that the students can learn more if the textbooks they use consist of lots of white space and different activities. According to him, such activities can develop learners' confidence by engaging them in using the target language. Hence, the importance of the role of textbooks in teaching and learning process is clear and definite; from both teachers' and students' perspectives. As such, as a part of the materials used in the language classroom, the textbook can determine the quality of learning-teaching procedure. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to evaluate such materials based on valid and reliable instruments.

Without any doubt textbooks play a crucial part in teaching English as a foreign language in formal education context, where the main source of interaction between teachers and students is the textbooks. Moreover, evaluation is an important aspect of any kind teaching and learning. According to Zohrabi (2011), material evaluation should be the top priority of any curriculum. Generally speaking, since no textbook can be perfect, textbook evaluation is very important to clarify the suitability of the sources and find the best one (Gholami, Nikou & Souldanpour, 2012). In addition to these, because textbook evaluation involves production, assessment, and adaptation of materials, it is necessary for teachers to regularly execute evaluation processes that guarantee the pedagogical contribution of the books to both learning and teaching procedure and also become sure of their suitability for not only the context, but also the learners who use them (Azizifar, 2009).

### **Statement of the problem**

In Iran, textbooks provide the basis for language input learners receive, the content of lessons, and the language practice in the classroom. Iranian students study English for nearly six years in secondary school. However, the education they receive neither enables them to gain full competence in using English language nor helps them to interact with the other English Speakers successfully. Accordingly, the level of achievement of EFL learners in Iran had long been unsatisfactory to those who work in education. A consistent urge to raise the students' achievement had been of a high concern to the decision-makers in the Iranian Ministry of Education. Supervisors, teachers, students, and parents' complaints have appeared systematically in newspapers (Keibari, 1999). Complaints have been raised about the quality of the EFL curriculum to the decision-makers at the Ministry of Education. One of the major factors

that contributes to students' unsatisfactory achievement was the textbook (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2014). Consequently, there would be a need for revising and updating the curriculum and the academic content in order to follow up the rapid developments in education.

### **Objectives of the study**

Therefore, the aim of this research is to evaluate the appropriateness and suitability of English Book 3 used in Iranian secondary schools from teachers' perspectives at Bandar Abbas Secondary schools. What motivated the present study to be undertaken is the need to be informed of the teachers' attitudes towards the English text book 3 they teach in secondary schools, since they are the practitioners who have hand on experiences with the textbooks and can observe students' performance best. Thus, the current research investigates the quality of the Ninth Grade Secondary School English textbook, "Prospect 3", set through demonstrating an attitudinal questionnaire to teachers. This questionnaire will ask for teachers' point of view about the text book, considering four aspects of the book: aims and achievement, skills, language type and technical consideration.

### **Research questions**

Since this study focuses on the attitudes of teachers towards the textbook they are using at the third grade of secondary schools in Iran, the following research questions and hypotheses were formed:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards the aims and achievements of third grade secondary school EFL textbook?
2. What are teachers' attitudes towards different language types used in the third grade secondary school textbook to develop Iranian Learners language learning?
3. What are teachers' attitudes towards the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' skills by the third grade secondary school textbook?
4. What are teachers' attitudes towards the technical considerations covered in the third grade secondary school EFL textbook to improve Iranian students' language learning?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Education and curriculum**

Webster (2005) also defined the curriculum as "the courses offered by educational institution" (p. 284). In recent years, the quality of education in many countries of the world has been of a national concern. The three major pillars of education are student achievement, teacher proficiency, and curriculum (Al-Rasheed, 1998). The components of the curriculum are identified as the educational objectives, the content, the teaching strategies, and the evaluation techniques (Miller & Sellar, 1985; Thomas, 2007). Talmage (1972) stated that in the beginning of the 1990s, the textbook was synonymous with the curriculum. Furthermore Garinger (2002) stated that a textbook

could be a curriculum. So, a very important part of any educational curriculum is its textbook. Richards (2001) considered textbooks as an important source to help new teachers in their course and activity design. Crossley and Murby (1994) asserted that one of the most cost-effective ways of improving the quality of education in developing countries is the increased access to textbooks that are "pedagogically sound, culturally relevant, and physically durable" (p. 110). This suggests again that researching the book appearance and the academic and cultural contents are important during analysis

### **Characteristics of the textbooks**

Ansary and Babaii (2002) mentioned some arguments for using a textbook. They propose that; "Without a textbook, learners think their learning is not taken seriously, in the eyes of the learners, no textbook means no purpose, and a textbook is a cheap way of providing learning materials" (p. 2). In addition to this, Garinger (2002) said that the textbook is economically prepared instructional materials. It saves the teachers' time, instead of searching for different instructional materials and provides them with what they need. In the same vein, Garinger (2002) posits that the textbook deal with a reasonable number of course objectives so that it worth purchasing for the teacher and the students. Garinger (2002) also pointed to another issue when he proposed that,

The textbook should meet the needs of the learners in several ways, not only in terms of language objectives. Students and teachers both want visually stimulating material that is well organized and easy to follow, so layout, design, and organization should be considered. The learners' cultural background, ages, interests, and purposes in acquiring the second must also be considered (p. 1).

### **Role of textbooks in Language Learning**

English, as a global language, is one of the widespread mediums in many fields including politics, economy, and international education. English is the major tool to communicate with people worldwide and the major language applied for international trade and academic study (Wang, 2010). To this end, people tend to learn English as a foreign or second language in their countries. Educational materials in general and textbooks in particular have a crucial role in this process (Gholami, Nikou, & Soltanpour, 2012). Actually, curriculum, teaching materials and methods, also evaluation should all be designed in accordance with learners needs (Kitao & Kitao, 2003).

### **Textbook Evaluation**

The quality part of any curriculum is the knowledge of its components and its foundations (Miller & Seller, 1985; Trump & Miller, 1979). Tomlinson et al. (2001) asserts that textbook evaluation is an activity in applied linguistics which allows teachers, supervisors, administrators and materials developers to judge the effectiveness of the materials on the people who employ them. In accordance with this, Pinar, Renolds, Slattery, and Tubman (2004) also confirmed that, "the process of

evaluation is essentially the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives are actually being realized by the program of curriculum and instructor" (p.732). In addition, Hewitt (2006) stated that analysis of a curriculum in such ways can provide practical information for practitioners about curriculum-in-use.

One effective way of conducting a textbook evaluation and making sure the needs and wants of learners are considered carefully when choosing English language textbooks is to using a written checklist of appropriate selection criteria. In this respect, McDonough and Shaw's (1993) two-stage model for course book evaluation is an apparently logical framework for conducting a detailed analysis of a course book. Their checklist provides guidance on performing the analysis but still remains flexible. They describe it as "a model which distinguishes the purpose behind the evaluation" (McDonough & Shaw 1993, p. 65) and continue to say that it is [a]n external evaluation which offers a brief "overview of the materials from the outside (cover, introduction, table of contents), which is then followed by a closer and more detailed internal evaluation" (McDonough & Shaw 1993, p. 66).

### **Textbook Evaluation studies**

In Iran and other countries several projects have been carried out to evaluate TEFL textbooks. For Instance, Tok (2010) examined the advantages and disadvantages English language textbooks "Spot On", which are used in state primary schools in Turkey. The results of the study indicated that 'Spot On' textbook proved not well enough compared to a systematic in-depth analysis and the negative attributes were far more than its positive characteristics. In another study, Sahragard, Rahimi and Zaremoayyedi (2009) examined Interchange series, using Little John's detailed framework (1998). The most significant finding of their evaluation was that in these series it is not learners who initiate the tasks.

Regarding the context of Iran and high school English textbooks, several studies have been conducted on the evaluation of previously published ones. Razmjoo (2007) compared Iranian high school with private institute textbooks regarding the communicative language teaching (CLT) principles. He concluded that although high school textbooks are not conducive to CLT implementation, textbooks used in private institute greatly represent the CLT principles. In another study, Yarmohammadi (2002) conducted an evaluation on the senior high school textbooks based on Tucker's model revised version. Result of his evaluations showed lot of shortcomings such as not authenticity of the textbook; interchangeable used English and Persian names; and ignorance of Oral skills. RimaniNikou and Soleimani (2012), too, investigated representation of culture principles in the Iranian and Turkish high school English textbooks and investigated the cultural references in these textbooks. To this end, they used Ramirez and Hall's (1990) categorization and carried out their analysis within a coding scheme with eight categories. They concluded that, both Turkey and Iranian high school textbooks, are not adequate enough to provide new information or broaden students' worldview or cultural awareness. In their own words, "the findings of the

study present the point that cultural principles are not utilized in the Iranian and Turkish high school textbooks" (RimaniNikou & Soleimani, 2012, p. 654).

In 2013, Farrokhi and Saadi conducted a rather different study and evaluated first-year high school Iranian EFL learners' perceptions textbook towards tasks and speech acts and compared their perceptions with the actual content of their textbooks. Findings of the study, showed that the learners generally had positive perception of the tasks and the teaching of speech acts as being highly effective; however they rated the language functions section of their textbook to be ineffective in this regard. So, a wide gaps between the Iranian learners' perceptions and the actual content of their textbooks was observed (Farrokhi & Saadi, 2013).

So, all the studies found in the literature, to the best of researchers' knowledge seem to postulate that changes should be made if we want to prepare the student to communicate in the multicultural world of English and if we want to use the nationally developed textbooks for the optimum benefit. Considering the fact that in 2015, a new English textbook, was introduced in to language education system of high schools, there is an urge to evaluate to this new book to find teachers attitude towards this one. This study will be conducted through implication of McDonough and Shaw's (1993) two-stage model. This model examines aims of the text books and achievements gained through the book application, skills incorporated in the book and obtained by language learners, language type incorporated in the book and finally technical considerations of the textbook. Therefore, this study will be an attempt to evaluate Third Grade Secondary School Book "Prospect3" from Teachers' Viewpoints through administrating McDonough and Shaw's (1993) proposed questionnaire.

## **METHOD**

This is a qualitative study which has no experimental or control group and is based on the textbook evaluation.

### **Participants**

This study relied on the active participation of 35 instructors, of the High schools in Bandar Abbas, teaching Prospect 3. They were asked to fill the questionnaire related to textbook evaluation. The participants were both male and female. Most of them had between 15 to 20 years of experience in teaching secondary school text books. The selection was based on convenient sampling procedure.

### **Materials**

The Prospect3 written by- AlaviMoghaddam et al. (2015), as a newly designed textbook for secondary school students at third grade was selected. The book consists of six lessons including: personality, travel, festivals and ceremonies, service, media health and injuries and work book. However, the evaluation was not based on a single lesson and the overall concept of the book was considered in this study.

In order to collect relevant data for this study, McDonough and Shaw's (1993) checklist based on their two-stage model for course book evaluation were employed by the researcher. The checklist provided by McDonough and Shaw (1993) for textbook evaluation consists of 35 items, about the following criteria:

- Aims and achievement
- Skills
- Language Type
- Technical considerations

The researcher favored document analysis (by the help of checklists) over questionnaire because the issue of evaluating the appropriateness of the above mentioned material demands thorough and intensive evaluation. Hence, only document analysis is used as a means of gathering the necessary information.

### **Data collection and analysis procedure**

In order to collect that relevant data, the employed questionnaire was both emailed and provided in hard copies, due to the unavailability of teachers. This was a kind of macro and formative evaluation which made an assessment of the entire textbook and had to be executed during the implementation of the book. Thus, after giving teachers the checklist, they were asked to complete the checklist based on their observations and learner's achievement in accordance with the whole book. The checklist was based on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1, which was "disagree", 2 which was "neutral" and 3, which was "agree".

To analyze the data gathered descriptive statistics was applied. Statistical procedures employed include descriptive statistics for various items on the survey to examine means, overall totals, and standard deviations. Our dependent variable was evaluation of EFL textbooks and independent variable was teachers' attitude. To answer the research questions, the researchers compared the total means of the data obtained from the questionnaire as to every four aspects, to find out the overall attitude of teachers towards the textbook they are teaching.

Checklist was based on a 3-point likert scale; the mean of above 2 indicates the satisfaction of the participants with the textbook while a mean of below 2 could shows that the characteristics of the book were not appealing to the participants.

### **RESULTS**

Following table shows the numerical data obtained from the questionnaires, for the four examined aspects of the textbook "Prospect 3".

**Table 1.** Descriptive Results for the Means in each Section

Sections	Teachers		
	Number	Mean	SD
Aims and Achievement	35	2.14	0.242
Skill	35	2.23	0.297
Language type	35	2.05	0.388
Technical consideration	35	2.85	0.205
Overall consensus	35	2.31	0.362
Total	35	2.31	0.362

As shown in the above table, the overall attitude of teachers towards aims and achievement with  $M=2.14$  is positive; towards skills with  $M=2.23$  is positive, referring to language type with  $M=2.05$ , is not as much positive as the previous ones; and finally it is the highest positive attitude towards technical consideration with  $M=2.85$ . Generally teachers' attitude towards the textbook with total  $M=2.31$  is positive; however, the mean is very close to 3 which demonstrates the highest rate of agreement among teachers.

## DISCUSSION

By looking at the mean of each question responded by the selected teachers, the following results were obtained:

### Teachers' Attitude towards Aims and Achievements

The aims and objectives of the textbook correspond to the needs and goals of the students. As it is clear from mean table, most teachers believed that the objectives corresponded to the needs and goals of the students. They believed that the approaches of learning English had changed after the design the new book.

### Teachers' Attitude towards Skills

Teacher's attitude towards the integration of skill is positive. As most teachers believed, all skills had been integrated in the new book ( $M=2.37$ )(Appendix I). This idea is in congruent with communicative language teaching and learning.

### Teachers' Attitude towards Language type

The language used in the textbook is not authentic and accurate. Teachers believed that the language used for the book was not quite authentic and accurate. As they rated the checklist, they saw that there were, however, more cases of which the language was quite artificial not natural. The names used in the book have been localized and they are not authentic. The conversations have been produced and manipulated by Iranian EFL teachers and we cannot claim that they are authentic and accurate. However, the vocabulary load is suitable. As it is clear from the mean table, almost all of the teachers expressed that the vocabulary load was good ( $M=2.65$ )(Appendix I); still, there was no room to use words practically.



## Teachers' Attitude towards Technical Considerations

As most teachers contend, the book has no problem regarding the quality. However, it can have a better quality like most ELT books available and taught in different language institutes in Iran such as Top Notch, Interchange, and Four Corners. Of course, the new book cannot be comparable to these authentic books available in markets. Findings of this study are in contrast with those of Aliakbari (2004) and RimaniNikou and Soleimani (2012), who both concluded that The ELT textbooks in Iran appeared too weak to provide new information or broaden students' worldview or cultural understanding.

Teachers believed that generally, "Prospect 3" did not include authentic materials, this is in line with, Yarmohammadi (2002) who concluded that these textbooks suffered from not authenticity and English and Persian names being used interchangeably. Furthermore, the results of the study are in line with the beliefs of Posner (1995) who claimed that analyzing curriculum would allow individuals to better understand the strengths and the weakness of that curriculum, which in turn could be good guide to apply in the context. Pinar et al. (2004) also confirmed that, "The process of evaluation was essentially the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives were actually being realized by the program of curriculum and instructor" (p.732).

The results obtained from this study could imply that the textbook under study, unlike the previous textbooks, had partially aroused the interests of the users. Thus, it seems that the development of the EFL materials for other grades at school could imitate the salient features of this textbook. The use of colorful pictures, authentic language, practical exercises and dialogues, and speaking and listening activities are a number of positive points regarding the textbook under the study. The other point refers to the photos in the textbook, which are considered as one of the advantages of the book.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, based on the reviews provided in the present study, it is suggested that perhaps one of the crucial reasons for the inefficiency of the EFL high school textbooks used in Iran is related to their shortcomings and weaknesses. In conclusion, there may be an essential need for the prescribed EFL textbooks to be modified by the Iranian syllabus designers and textbook developers. In revising the textbooks, good qualities of the textbooks should be retained and the shortcomings should be eliminated. It is suggested that textbooks authors pay close attention to these shortcomings and redesign the textbooks in line with latest trends in the world.

Some of the issues emerging from this finding relate specifically to improvement of ELT textbooks in Iran. An implication of this study is the possibility of producing EFL materials which trigger communicative language learning which will eventually lead to better speaking ability of learners. This finding has important implications for teachers since it makes them more aware of the in depth evaluation and examination of the textbook they are dealing with.

This study is limited to English teachers in Bandar Abbas. Therefore, conclusions need to be verified by conducting similar studies across different cities in Iran. Also, this study focused on the evaluation of the EFL textbook taught at the third grade secondary schools and did not consider the other textbooks taught at other grades. So, although this study tried to answer the proposed research questions to the fullest, taking into account the mentioned limitations, it is recommended that further research be undertaken to examine learners and other material developers' point of view towards this textbook or another feature of textbooks such as discourse. Moreover, other studies can be conducted throughout Iran in various schools through random selection regarding textbook evaluation, and examination of teachers' attitudes towards cultural content through both checklist and interview can be another study to be done.

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### Appendix I

Criteria	N	Mean	Standard deviation
<i>Aims and achievements</i>			
1. The aims and objectives of the textbook correspond to the needs and goals of the students.	35	2.37	.910
2. The materials have increased the linguistic proficiency of the learners.	35	2.11	.993
3. The materials have helped the learners to become autonomous learners.	35	1.82	.97
4. The materials have increased the motivation and the confidence of the learners and the teachers.	35	2.28	.89
<i>Skills</i>			
5. The practice of each skill is integrated to the practice of the other one?	35	2.37	.910
6. All skills are covered.	35	1.54	.885
7. The textbook pays attention to sub-skills such as note-taking, skimming, scanning and paraphrasing	35	2.37	.910
8. The textbook includes practice on natural pronunciation.	35	2.64	1.89
9. The listening material is well recorded, motivating and comprehensive.	35	1.84	.97
10. The writing material is well organized, controlled and effective in enhancing writing abilities.	35	2.35	.873
11. The written work is related to structures and vocabulary practiced orally.	35	2.4	.913
12. The writing material demonstrates techniques for handling aspects of composition teaching.	35	2.35	.917
13. The reading passages are enough, interesting and of appropriate length.	35	2.36	.895
14. The textbook contains the passages within the vocabulary range of the learners.	35	2.02	.93
15. The material for spoken English is well teachable in the classroom and effective in preparing learners for real life interactions.	35	2.22	.94
16. The textbook includes speech situations relevant to the learners' background.	35	2.38	.903
<i>Language type</i>			
17. The language is used in the textbook authentic and accurate.	35	2.08	.996
18. The progression of grammatical points is appropriate.	35	2.41	.906
19. The textbook provides a variety of registers and text types.	35	1.88	.979
20. The linguistic items introduced in meaningful context to facilitate understanding.	35	2.44	.891
21. The sequence of presentation of the vocabulary and structures is suitable.	35	2.31	.961

22. The vocabulary load is suitable.	35	2.65	.725
23. The textbook emphasizes vocabulary learning strategy.	35	1.82	.985
24. The grammatical structures and vocabulary are reviewed in a systematic recycling for reinforcement.	35	1.94	1.012
25. The textbook highlights cultural concepts of American or British English.	35	1.62	.91
26. The textbook contains cultural biases and serotypes.	35	1.51	.817
27. The textbook provides enhanced input on pragmatic components of language such as discourse markers or discourse markers.	35	2	.939
28. The activities and exercises are sufficiently various to help people with different kinds of intelligences.	35	2.31	.900
29. The textbook is flexible.	35	1.74	.918
30. The textbook is easy to use for teachers.	35	1.55	.808
31. The textbook involves pair and group work.	35	2.42	.916
32. The communicative abilities have been developed.	35	1.5	.845
33. The workbook enhances learning.	35	2.65	.725
<i>Technical considerations</i>			
34. The paper has been made of durable and of high quality.	35	2.71	.710
35. The textbook and audio CD is available.	35	3	.0